

Sunday School Notes 17 February 2019: Luke 5:12-16: Touched by Jesus

Have you ever felt cut off from somebody? Maybe your best friend has moved away and isn't answering your WhatsApp or maybe it is just that someone is absent from school and you feel lost. Maybe your parents have divorced and you are no longer in such close contact with the parent who moved out. Maybe someone you love has died and you long for them.

Use those feelings to help you imagine then what it must have been like in the olden days for anyone who got ill with any contagious disease. There were no medicines which could help, no hospitals where they could be cared for and the only way to stop the disease from spreading things was to send these people out of the town to live on their own in the countryside. They had to shout out or ring a bell when they saw anyone to warn the other person to stay far away. I am sure God meant the people to leave out food for them, but sometimes people just abandoned them.

This treatment meant that the disease couldn't spread, but it was really tough on the person – no contact with family, no hugs, never being able to do anything as a family. The worst of these diseases was that some of them (like leprosy) went on getting worse and worse so the sick people knew they would never be able to go home.

One day a someone with a major skin disease came to Jesus for help. He must have seen that Jesus was different and that's what gave him the courage to come. Other teachers ran away from 'lepers' – some would even throw stones at them. But this man knew Jesus would react differently. So he came near Jesus and then bowed down saying "If you wanted to, you could heal me." Notice, he didn't even feel brave enough to beg for help.

And then the leper got the shock of his life. Jesus reached out and touched him! For the first time perhaps for years, the leper felt a human touch. Jesus knew that this man needed healing from the disease, but he knew the man also needed to be cured of the thought that nobody cared.

Jesus went on to say: "I do want to heal you. Become clean!" And immediately the disease left the man. He was healed. He couldn't go home yet. He still had to go to the priests so they could do certain checks over the next 2 weeks to make sure he was really better. But the future became brighter for there was hope.

The other people around were amazed. And what do you think happened? Yes, even more people came to visit Jesus for healing. And somehow the message got through to the other lepers also because we have stories of Jesus healing other lepers who came to him.

We don't have much leprosy in S.A. so why do we have this story? Well, clearly Dr Luke found it amazing that a disease which was regarded as incurable could be cured by Jesus without anything more than a touch. But also it shows that Jesus doesn't push anyone away – he is prepared to touch every life and be part of everybody's journey. What an over-the-top attitude!

No matter who we are, Jesus is there for us.

One of my favourite stories has always been that of Father Damien who went to live among lepers at Molokai. I might- if there is time - tell that story to illustrate that we too are meant to be available to others to heal them emotionally and spiritually. If you are interested, his story is told on Google – just search under Father Damien. If you do make this point, please cover the fact that this can only be done if, like Jesus, we withdraw to pray.